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THE BALTIMORE SUN

September 7, 1999, Tuesday ,FINAL

**SECTION:** LOCAL ,2B

**LENGTH:** 945 words

**HEADLINE:** Challengers undaunted in tough race; Incumbents have edge in City Council campaign

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**SOURCE:** SUN STAFF

**BODY:**

Stephanie C. Rawlings and Helen L. Holton remember well their first race for a 5th District Baltimore City Council seat four years ago.

Political neophytes, they fought their way to the top of a 15-person Democratic primary field -- and ultimately their seats on the council -- along with the lone incumbent seeking re-election, Rochelle "Rikki" Spector.

"That race was so hotly contested, the campaign schedule was so grueling," recalled Rawlings. Added Holton: "I worked my butt off."

This year, as political incumbents, the two first-term council members find the pace considerably less frenetic -- and the field of candidates substantially smaller.

They are running with Spector, a 23-year council veteran, in the Sept. 14 Democratic primary for new four-year terms from the district that encompasses most of the city's Northwest corner, against six largely unknown and underfinanced challengers.

Two Republican candidates -- Peter B. Dubyoski and Sanford D. Horn -- are unopposed in the primary and will appear on the ballot in November's general election.

The district is notable for its tradition of high voter turnout and its diversity. The district is about 70 percent black and has large concentrations of Orthodox Jews on upper Park Heights Avenue and Caribbean-born residents in the Pimlico area.

It includes desirable upscale neighborhoods such as Ashburton -- the home of departing Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke, Mount Washington and Roland Park, as well as poorer problem areas such as lower Park Heights Avenue.

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The Spector- Rawlings-Holton ticket strikes many as a formidable team.

"The incumbents look strong," said Roland Holmes, a board member and past president of the Ashburton-East Arlington Neighborhood Association, who ran unsuccessfully for a council seat in 1995. As for the challengers, he said, "They are people I have never heard of."

Along with incumbency and name recognition, Spector, 63, Rawlings, 29, and Holton, 39, have the advantage of more campaign funds.

Together, the three had raised a total of \$72,308 through their individual committees, according to last month's mid-August finance reports, and \$12,132 through their joint committee.

By contrast, four of their six challengers -- Antonio A. Asa, Morris Davis, Deborah R. English and Ed Potillo -- have filed affidavits stating they will spend \$1,000 or less on their campaigns, according to local election officials.

Of the other two candidates, Joseph B. Church lent his campaign \$9,000 of his own money and Patrick J. Burns had raised slightly less than half that amount.

What the challengers lack in money they make up for in moxie.

"I knew I would be outspent 10 to 1 going into this thing," said Burns, a 35-year-old stock and real estate investor and the past president of the Westgate Community Association.

Burns said he wants to raise the city's bond rating to AAA, the highest possible. He notes correctly that such an achievement would save Baltimore millions of dollars in annual interest payments, but in doing so glosses over the fact that most fiscal observers consider it a minor miracle that Baltimore has managed to maintain its A rating, given the city's fiscal problems.

Davis, a 36-year-old security officer, said he would expand industrial parks to create jobs.

Davis, too, says he is undaunted by the gap he faces in recognition and resources.

"A lot of people want change," he said. "Any newcomer has a chance."

Asa, 45, academic dean of The Greater Valor Bible College and Seminary on Belmont Avenue, wants to expand loan programs to small companies and institute school-based business programs.

He said the incumbents have been unresponsive to neighborhood decline, and he shrugs off their lead in funds.

"It's up to them if they want to spend a lot of money," he said. "It's not going to do them any good."

The incumbents are polite toward their challengers, but unperturbed by them.

"I don't really think there's much support for the other candidates," said Spector.

They say they have worked hard on behalf of their district and the city, with Holton mentioning efforts to curb illegal pay phones and Rawlings mentioning her work to expand night life downtown.

They have connections, professional and personal, with state officials: Spector sits on the board of the Maryland Association of Counties; Rawlings is the daughter of House Appropriations chairman Howard P. Rawlings, and Holton is the niece of state Sen. Delores G. Kelley.

And, they will tell you, they have cohesiveness, sharing their resources in the council as well as the campaign. "If you have a team that has worked together as we have, it's a good thing," said Holton.

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There is, however, one significant difference that has emerged among the three this year: who they support for mayor.

Holton is backing former councilman and school board member Carl Stokes, while Rawlings and Spector favor council colleague Martin O'Malley, who mentioned their support during last week's television debate on WBAL.

Holton said she likes Stokes for his experience. "I think overall he's got more maturity," she said.

Rawlings and Spector say O'Malley has the ability and vision. "He has the tools to do the job," Rawlings said.

Rawlings, who is black, acknowledges that some voters are upset with her backing of O'Malley, who is white.

"I get a lot of talk from people saying, 'You're going to let a white run your city?'" she said.

She tells them to forget about his race and examine his record and listen to what he has to say.

When she did that, she said, "It was clear to me who to endorse."

**GRAPHIC:** MAP(S) 5TH DISTRICT

**LOAD-DATE:** September 8, 1999